

# **SOCIALIST STUDIES**

**No. 31**

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THE SOCIALIST PARTY  
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## THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

### OBJECT

*The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.*

### DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

#### THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged Labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

ALL ENQUIRIES AND APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP TO...

The Socialist Party of Great Britain,

71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, London N12 8SB

## WHAT CAN I DO?

Socialists are often accused of being arm-chair philosophers living a political life of quiescent contemplation. We are criticised for not being men and women of action: the first on the picket line, the first at the head of a demonstration or not and the first to the barricade.

The criticism is fatuous. Picket lines, demonstrations, riots and barricade are the immature political action of romantics who have no practical grasp of social reality, who do not understand what is and what is not possible when it comes to Socialist action and the conditions necessary to establish Socialism.

But it does raise an important question for Socialists no matter where they are. And this is the question "What can I do?" What constitutes effective Socialist action?

Principally, Socialist action sets out to propagate Socialist ideas and to convince workers to become Socialists. To build up the number of Socialists in society is vitally important. Without active Socialists, the dissemination of Socialist ideas becomes less effective.

The avenues in which to spread Socialist ideas are varied. Attempts can be made to get on television and the radio in order to put the Socialist case. Another avenue is to write letters to the national and local press. Many Socialists speak at indoor and outdoor meetings, enter into public debate with opponents, and write leaflets and articles for **Socialist Studies**.

Word of mouth is also useful in spreading Socialist ideas to either friends, relatives, work colleagues and trade union members. Socialists can write books and pamphlets, make films and videos, and use art, literature and poetry to get over to workers the need for Socialism.

Elections are also effective for Socialist propaganda through the distribution of election leaflets and other Socialist material. Socialists can and do vote. They vote for Socialism across the ballot paper when there is no Socialist candidate and for a Socialist delegate when there is.

At the end of the day, the truth of the matter is that, currently and regrettably, there are not enough Socialists. This, though, is not an excuse for doing nothing nor for cynicism. **Socialist Studies** can be distributed outside railway stations and at airports, it can be left in libraries, schools and universities.

Socialists have to be optimists. Socialists are like beacons of light from a lighthouse in a tempestuous blackness. Occasionally we hit other rays of light, some weak and some strong. Some rays will fade away and others begin anew. And in these shafts of light lies the optimism for a Socialist future.

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## CAPITALISM KILLS

Although blue and brown asbestos has been banned in Britain, many workers, particularly those in the construction industry, have been exposed to the harmful effects of the product. Workers who were exposed in the 1950's and 1960's, when its use was widespread, have only recently been diagnosed as suffering from asbestos-related diseases.

In an article **White Asbestos: Fatal Legacy for the Future**, the author writes:

*In 1995 the Health and Safety Executive reported 3,000 deaths per year from asbestos-related illnesses. Professor Julian Peto, Head of the Section of Epidemiology at the Institute of Cancer Research in London, has published an analysis of trends in asbestos-related diseases. There are no cures for these diseases. Death from the asbestos-induced cancer of*

*mesothelioma are currently at about 1,200 per year. A rise in this figure is predicted: around 2020 there will be about 3,000 deaths per year. In addition, the Health and Safety Executive asbestos survey suggests that about 4% or 1,000 of the 25,000 lung cancers diagnosed annually in British men are asbestos induced.* C Pinfold, **Construction Law 1998**

The social reformer's solution is to pass more legislation. And, indeed, new laws governing the work in and around asbestos are forthcoming. Other reformers, notably academics, write books calling for the extension of corporate manslaughter to members of the board of directors to cover deaths at work. The reality is that there is bookshelf after bookshelf of health and safety legislation. The last comprehensive piece of legislation, The Construction, Design and Management Regulations Act 1996, was passed to minimise and reduce deaths in the construction and maintenance of buildings. In its first year of enactment deaths on buildings sites actually increased.

Workers who have suffered from asbestos-related diseases are also offered legal restitution. The lawyer firm specialising in asbestos claims by workers against employers, Field Fisher Waterhouse, has obtained £41 million in compensation on behalf of asbestos disease sufferers and their families.

However compensation for a life ruined and a partner or parent killed or severely incapacitated is hardly going to be offset by money. What price widowhood? What price in being orphaned? What price the painful living death of mesothelioma? Compensation, like charity, is an insult.

Asbestos was extensively used because it was a cheap material in fireproofing boilers, plant and constructional elements. There are numerous other building materials which are following asbestos in their negative effect on users: glass fibre, mineral particle board and the industrial process in the production of UVPC. So what can be done to deal effectively with the problem? An understanding of capitalism is a prerequisite for a solution. And this means placing the problem in a Socialist context.

The problem is two-fold. First workers, when they enter the labour market and sell their labour power, enter an alien working environment where the employers' objective is to make a profit. The second is that employers, to minimise and hold down costs under pain of competition, have to find and use cheap materials. In short, the ill-health workers are faced with at work is a result of the inappropriate priorities placed on production. The priorities under capitalism are governed by profit. In cost-benefit terms it is worth some employers taking the risks of producing dangerously if the profit is higher than the cost of negligence claims, fines and compensation.

As an example Allan Engler, the writer, reminds us of cost-benefit analysis in practice:

*The Ford Pinto shows how corporate cost-benefit analysis can overlook serious harm done to others.*

*This car's fuel tank could burst into flames when hit from the rear. Ford engineers calculated that the problem could be corrected at an additional cost of \$11 a car, but top executives rejected the engineering proposal after receiving a cost-benefit analysis that concluded it would be cheaper to pay out \$200,000 for each of the 180 anticipated deaths a year.*

**Apostles of Greed: Capitalism and the  
Myth of the Individual in the Market.** p81

Given the establishment of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society, what would be produced and used in a socialist society would be weighted towards social ends - the effect on workers and their health and safety, the effect on end consumers and on the environment. In other words, the criteria for producing anything would be governed by social considerations and not by profit. Until Socialism is established capitalist production will carry on destroying the lives of many workers both now and in the future. In this lies the failure of a century of social reformism.

## MARX ON TECHNOLOGY

The media claim that the introduction of information technology and computers will mean less work and increased leisure. This prosaic romanticism should be taken with a pinch of salt. Capitalists do not introduce technology to unburden the stress and discomfort of employment. Technology is used by employers against workers as an aspect of the class struggle.

Marx, whose feet were firmly on the ground and who had a good grasp of what motivates employers, had this to say about technology:

*The automatic workshop opened its career with acts which were anything but philanthropic. Children were kept at work by means of the whip: they were made an object of traffic and contracts were undertaken with orphanages. All the laws on the apprenticeship of workers were repealed. .... finally, from 1825 onwards (the date of the first economic crisis) almost all the new inventions were the result of collisions between the worker and the employer who sought at all costs to depreciate the worker's specialised ability. After each new strike of any importance there appeared a new machine. So little indeed did the worker see in the application of machinery a sort of rehabilitation. ... that in the eighteenth century he resisted for a very long time the incipient domination of automation ....*

*... In short, with the introduction of machinery the division of labour inside the workshop has increased, the task of the worker inside the workshop has been simplified, capital has been concentrated, the human being has been further dismembered.*

Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Chapter 11

*The Metaphysics of Political Economy*, Moscow edition, 1976 p130

## REVOLUTION WITH THE BALLOT BOX

**Discussion Bulletin** is a journal published in the U.S.A. Its De Leonist contributors have had a lengthy debate as to whether the working class can use the ballot for revolutionary ends.

Socialists take exception to the term "*parliamentary cretinism*" used by one contributor to the discussion. Likewise when the idea of using the electoral road was described as being similar to a belief in Santa Claus.

Maybe the Socialist Party of Great Britain does not fit into **Discussion Bulletin's** definition of "*real revolutionaries*" but we share the view that "*debate and discussion require that both sides be heard*" (**DB 91**), and it seems to us that, so far, our side of the argument has not been put.

Many of the contributors argue that workers could end the class struggle by means of a General Strike, a lockout or an occupation strike. But this is surely the most naive position possible. How many times have state forces been used to break a strike?

The state exists primarily for one purpose - to defend the interests of the capitalist class. That is why even neutral governments have armed forces. These nations may not use their forces against other states but, if necessary, they would certainly use armed force to defeat workers taking industrial action. As one writer in **DB** argued: "*the workers ... can never possess the weapons or military organisation to defeat the armed forces of the state on their terrain of violence*" (**DB 91**).

Consider the call by another contributor to "*abolish the class state*". This writer argues against the use of the ballot on the grounds that the capitalist class will "*pick up the bayonet*" if their rule is actually threatened by mass working class activity (**DB 91**). So, it seems that the capitalists would resort to dictatorship

and violence against a Socialist democratic majority at the ballot box, but do nothing if confronted by a lockout or a General Strike. To put it mildly, we find this assumption rather implausible.

In order to achieve anything, you need to have the power to do it. To abolish the state you need first to gain control of it - you need political power. Just how are the working class supposed to abolish the state if they do not first gain control over it? Way back in 1848, Marx and Engels had a clearer view:

*Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another ... every class struggle is a political struggle.*

The machinery of government, with its armed forces, its police, its judiciary and jails - all this exists primarily to protect the interests of the capitalist class. But, as we all know, their preference is for us to consent to our exploitation. This is cheaper for them, less messy and much, much less bothersome. However that consent or consensus is only possible so long as the majority of workers, not just in America but world-wide, continue to believe mistakenly that capitalism is "*the best of all possible worlds*", and that socialism/communism was what failed in Russia. But when ideology fails, the capitalist class has state force at its disposal. If they can, they will use it. That is why it is essential for Socialists to gain political power: to ensure that the state forces cannot be used against the Socialist movement.

In several of the letters published in **Discussion Bulletin** on this subject there is a significant common thread: ie a failure even to mention the necessity of class consciousness as a precondition for any successful Socialist revolutionary movement. Perhaps this is taken for granted? An exception was a reply to **Internationalism** (DB 91) where the writer noted De Leon's view of union leaders as being "*without the understanding of economics and history that education in the socialist movement brings*", which explained their becoming cynical, self-serving or looking to "*cooperation with the masters*".

But the same writer argued "...electoral efforts during the 1870's and 80's showed that through its control of the state, capital could count out socialist candidates or use their wealth to corrupt them if they were elected". Surely, if these "socialist candidates" had understood their class position and class interests, and had been elected on a Socialist ticket by a class-conscious majority of workers, as delegates with a mandate for Socialism and no immediate demands, this could not have happened.

So the Socialist Party of Great Britain argues that you cannot achieve Socialism without Socialists. To achieve Socialism we need first to ensure that the majority of workers are class-conscious, determined to end class exploitation, and to do so democratically. The lessons to be learnt from the electoral experiences of the 1870's and 1880's - not to mention the long history of so-called Socialist parties in this century - is that you do not achieve Socialism by means of reforming capitalism.

The use of the ballot by Socialists is not merely for legitimation purposes - although being able to demonstrate the strength of support the Party has, by the number of votes cast, could be useful. The main reason for advocating the electoral road is that, unless the working class gain control of the state and, with it, the coercive forces which the capitalist class would need to defend their class interests, these forces would inevitably be used against the revolution, to crush it.

One reason that the electoral road is rejected by many of the writers in **Discussion Bulletin** is their misreading of the "*lessons of history*". The various revolts and revolutions which they cite - eg Russia in 1905 and 1917, Chile, etc - are irrelevant to this discussion. None of these were situations where the majority of the working class were Socialist.

Likewise, the failure of the parties of the Second International was because they attracted support on the basis of their "*immediate demands*", putting Socialism at the tail end of their agenda.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has only one aim, by abolishing the class system, to establish a society based upon the common ownership and democratic control by and in the interests of the whole community of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth.

Such society will necessarily have to be democratic, consequently it can only be brought about democratically. And to disregard the probability of the capitalist class putting up some sort of resistance, using state forces to protect their class interests, would surely be suicidal folly. Hence the need to use the electoral system.

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### **UNEMPLOYMENT, CLASS AND RACE**

The recent Anne Frank (the Dutch girl who died at Auschwitz) exhibition touring Britain contained displays by the Council for Racial Equality (CRE) which claimed that, young white workers, made up only 8% of the unemployed while blacks and Asians composed some 18%. The conclusion the CRE wanted visitors to the exhibition to draw was that unemployment was a race issue. It is a conclusion Socialists dispute.

Workers, whether they are black, white or Asian, form part of the same class with the same interests and the same problems. The anguish, worry and hardship experienced by the unemployed white workers is as real, just as unpleasant and just as wasteful as the experience of unemployment felt by young blacks and Asians. The discomfort is the same, irrespective of colour, and the solution is the same irrespective of colour: Socialism.

For Socialists, unemployment is not a race issue. Unemployment is a class issue. We can understand the resentment felt by black workers who cannot get a job. We are well aware of the racism in capitalism which prevents black

workers from not getting a job. But to believe that race is the primary cause of unemployment is to put the cart before the horse. It might seem that way, but appearances are deceptive. To understand the question of race and race discrimination you first have to understand the social system which frames social relationships. Without an understanding of capitalism and the process of commodity production, including labour power, on social relationships then there can be no understanding of social problems like racism, and the social problem will fester, persist and, in periods of high unemployment, reflect itself politically with the growth of fascism.

The Council for Racial Equality, as a reformist organisation, has no interest in understanding the cause of unemployment. Crises, depression and unemployment flow from the anarchy of commodity production and exchange. Capitalism causes unemployment. The CRE is quite comfortable about capitalism. And here is its failure. The CRE believes in an equitable distribution of unemployment along race lines. Suppose they were successful and unemployment was the same for white, Asian and black workers, would this be a cause for celebration? It might at the CRE but not for the unemployed.

Socialists have demonstrated that unemployment derives from commodity production and exchange for a profit. When capitalists cannot employ workers profitably they sack them. Why unemployment occurs derives not from race but from the employer-employee relationship. Unemployment occurs because there is in fact employment. Without employment there would not be unemployment.

Unemployment has to be seen in the context of labour markets, the buying and selling of labour power, of production for profit, and of the wages system. Employment and work are not the same thing. Employment exists because, in a class-divided society under private property ownership, the majority are forced into selling their mental and physical ability to work to be exploited for a wage and salary in order to survive.

Racism occurs because workers, when competing for jobs, housing, hospital beds etc, blame other workers rather than becoming aware of the contradictions and conflicts which arise out of production for profit. Also, racism occurs because non-socialist workers fall prey to the political charlatans within capitalist politics, who for their own agenda, use the 'race card' to gain support. Socialists oppose all racism no matter from where it is being directed.

As for racial equality, this can only ever come about in a social system where there is common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution, that is: in Socialism. To say this, though, is to go against the political correctness of the organisers of the Anne Frank Exhibition and the CRE's contribution to the study of racism in the last decades of this century, which explained nothing and failed the thousands of people who attended.

Capitalism cannot provide a conflict-free, egalitarian society. There will always be winners and losers, the breeding ground for racial blame. And there will always be capitalist politicians, like Adolph Hitler, and Le Pen, ready to use the politics of race to further their political careers. The conservative journalist, Simon Heffer, in his recently published hagiography of Enoch Powell, **Like a Roman**, showed how Powell deliberately used his infamous "rivers of blood" speech to exploit racism for his own political ends.

Without an understanding and rejection of capitalism the mistakes of the past will only be made again by future generations of workers, leaving the way open for racial intolerance, discrimination and division to pass on into the next century.

Theodor Adorno, the unfortunately influential German philosopher, once wrote pessimistically that after Auschwitz there could no longer be any poetry. He was wrong. Optimism did survive the gas chambers of Europe, the world wars, the unemployment, the poverty, the barbarism and the waste of this century. It

survived, against all the odds, with the continued existence of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, whose message has been consistent and clear. If there are to be no more Belsens then there first has to be Socialism.

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### CAPITALISM CAUSES POVERTY

Academic economists state that there is only a limited supply of resources but an infinite demand for them. Population theorists assert that rising populations cause starvation. Both are wrong.

According to the World Bank Report, **The World Food Outlet (1993)**

*Both land and water are abundant according to both estimates. Only 11% of the world's land surface is used for agricultural crops and by one commonly accepted estimate, the world's land and water use for agriculture could more than double. World food production has more than kept pace with population growth and rates of food production show few signs of slowing.*

(Quoted from **The Daily Mail**, June 9 1998)

The World Bank report went on to state that in the 1980's world cereal production increased by 2.1% a year while population grew by 1.7%. This trend is not expected to fall.

So clearly there is a lot of agricultural technology being restricted in use. There is also a large amount of land which is also being under-used. The argument about limited resources, therefore, is a non-starter. And the assumption that there is infinite demand has no place in the real world. Society can produce enough to meet human needs but is prevented from doing so. The question to ask is why. The academic economists do not exist to answer this fundamental question.

And the neo-Malthusians wanting to see the production of more contraceptives have to answer why production could not be best served by providing more food when clearly there is a great under-capacity for producing foodstuffs and water. Like the academic economists, the population theorists are asking the wrong question.

The question of what prevents the supply of water and food to those that need them can be answered in one word: Capitalism. Capitalism does not exist to produce goods to meet people's needs. It produces commodities with a view to profit. The only people that capitalists are interested in are those who have the money to buy these commodities.

This will not be the case with Socialism. Socialism will provide the social framework for goods to be produced to meet human needs. Socialism would allow the productive forces to be developed. It would not restrict production. The only way in which social problems like poverty and hunger are to be resolved is through the establishment of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

The problem is that the world's resources, productive and distributive systems are owned by a parasitic minority class to the exclusion of the majority. While capitalism lasts so will the social problems that affect our class.

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## THE POVERTY OF WELFARE

Way back in 1994, Blair declared New Labour's intention was to "*put welfare to work*". Yet, nearly two years after being elected with a rock-solid majority, his government has still not found out how to deliver on its Manifesto commitment - to decrease "*the share of national income (spent) on the bills of economic and social failure*", ie the welfare budget. This inability to decide on

a policy was made abundantly clear when Frank Field resigned. He had been appointed to "think the unthinkable". As his unthinkable thoughts were unacceptable to his colleagues, Blair is now back to square one, without a welfare reform policy.

Since the dawn of capitalism, in Tudor times, the problem has always been how to arrange matters so that the capitalist class can have an economically redundant population, available for work when businesses need to expand, but without this costing too much, how to support these redundant workers and their dependents, without seeming to make them better off than those in work, and how to prevent destitution leading to revolt.

The key principle of capitalist welfare systems was clearly stated in the 1834 Report which led to the New Poor Law.

*The first and most essential of all conditions, a principle which we find universally admitted, ... is that (the pauper's) situation on the whole shall not be made really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourer of the lowest class.*

(Quoted from Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, p923 n.)

The same principle was endorsed by Beveridge in 1942, and is now echoed by New Labour. Of a radio interview by David Blunkett, *The Times* (22 December 1997) approvingly noted:

*Mr Blunkett could not have given a stronger endorsement to the principles of welfare reform - getting people off benefit into work, stopping scroungers, preventing a situation where people on benefit do better than those in work.*

New Labour's manifesto gave the vague impression that they intended to reduce overall spending on welfare, at least, on the costs of economic and social failure.

presumably by providing jobs for the unemployed. But even if 'full employment' could be ensured, there would still remain many people - the old, the very young, the infirm - who could not be employed. A ruthless government could disregard the destitute but that would be a risky strategy. In modern capitalism governments depend for their legitimacy on the fact that they are voted into power on the basis of workers' votes. As Quintin Hogg (Lord Hailsham) argued: "*If you do not give the people social reform, they are going to give you social revolution*" (House of Commons, 17 February 1943, quoted in **Beveridge Re-organises Poverty**, SPGB).

Behind the policy is pandering to prejudice: the idea that any form of public benefit will encourage idleness; that most of those on benefit are there from choice or fecklessness; and that any benefits should be obtainable at as low a rate as possible, under stringent, harsh, deterrent conditions.

Blair has often repeated his mantra: "*I want a nation at work, not on benefits*". The argument against so-called scroungers was put forcibly by Mandelson:

*It is not right that some people should collect the dole, live on the black economy, and then refuse to cooperate with society's efforts to re-integrate them into the labour market.*

Mandelson and Liddle, **The Blair Revolution**, p102

### **Blaming the Poor**

In recent decades a new theory about poverty has become accepted among politicians. Apparently, poverty is inherited.

*Poverty breeds poverty ... the cruel legacy of poverty is passed from parents to children.* **USA Government Economic Report, 1964**

The idea of a "*culture of poverty*" (Michael Harrington, **The Other America**).

1962) led to another glib phrase - "*the cycle of deprivation*" (speech by Tory, Keith Joseph 1972, quoted from **Poverty in the United Kingdom** by Peter Townsend, 1979).

Such ideas were swallowed, hook, line and sinker, by the New Labour zealots. Blair denounced as a "*moral and social evil*" the existence of "*an underclass of people, cut off from society's mainstream, living often in poverty, the black economy, crime and family instability*" (speech: 1996, quote from Tony Blair, **New Britain**, p59). Likewise, Peter Mandelson wrote of "*a culture of hopelessness, idleness and cynicism which a concentration of hard-core unemployment has bred in the many estates ... where a generation has been brought up on the dole*" (Mandelson and Liddle, **The Blair Revolution**, p102).

Such theories - if that is what they are - do nothing to explain the cause of poverty. They encourage a culture of blame, like the Victorian parsons and do-gooders who withheld charity from those they disapproved of - the so-called "*undeserving poor*".

Mandelson's phrase "*hard-core unemployment*" is revealing. We had heard of hard-core crime before but never of "*hard-core unemployment*". It implies that the victims of unemployment are unemployed from choice.

Yet the continuity of high levels of unemployment in many regions, in Britain and many other countries, is due to structural and cyclical trends in the economy, and in some cases to government policy. For instance, in some regions the collapse of coal-mining and shipbuilding has forced many into unemployment. The development of computer networking has enabled banks and insurance companies to close many branches, and many companies have been able to 'downsize', shedding large numbers of middle managers.

Along with this structural unemployment, usually triggered by the competitive introduction of new technology, there is also cyclical unemployment, caused by

the inherent instability of capitalism as it lurches from boom to slump. So when Blair naively asserted that he was "*absolutely committed to the goal of full employment*" (speech, Blackpool, 1994: **New Britain**, p38) he showed he clearly did not understand that capitalism itself is the cause of unemployment. As Marx showed, even a bourgeois economist like Ricardo knew that "*the same cause which may increase the net revenue ... may, at the same time, render the people redundant, and deteriorate the condition of the labourer*" (footnote, **Capital I**, chapter XXV, Section 3).

### **The Solution to Poverty**

The root cause of poverty is not, as Beveridge thought, in having children. Queen Victoria had quite a few but she was far from destitute. Many of the poor today have no children: the young homeless to be found now in most cities, sleeping rough, begging, selling 'The Big issue' - these are not destitute because of having children. Their problem is unemployment: employers will not employ them unless and until it is profitable to do so.

The problem of pauperism and destitution is intrinsic to the capitalist system. It is one which has never been solved or even tackled satisfactorily. There is no solution, within the class system. Since the start of capitalism, the problem for the capitalist class and their puppets in government remains the same: how to provide adequately for those of the working class they prefer not to employ - so as to prevent riots or worse - but to do so in such a frugal, economic, stingy way as not to make those in work envious.

They usually make out that this cheeseparing meanness is not so much a matter of keeping the cost down - ie a matter of their own class interest - as, hypocritically, from concern for our moral wellbeing. It is one thing for the rich to be idle, no harm in that. But it is a different matter where the poor are concerned.

As Robert Tressell wrote, satirically, of the Council and the local do-gooders:

*They were all so sorry for the poor, especially the dear little children. They did all sorts of things to help the children. In fact, there was nothing they would not do for them - except levy a halfpenny rate. It would never do to do that. It might pauperize the parents and destroy parental responsibility.*

#### **The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists**

The language used to describe reforms in the field of welfare, benefits, assistance, and the like, is invariably insincere. As Orwell noted: "*political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind*".

#### **(Politics and the English Language)**

Reforming the welfare system - usually code for cutting back on welfare spending - is not the answer. The cause of poverty, and of unemployment, is the class system, the system of production for profit. Get rid of that, and you get rid of misery and destitution. The DSS and its Giro-cheques cannot solve the problem - and are not designed to do so. This problem is part and parcel of the system of production for profit, so only by ending capitalism and replacing this system with one of common ownership and production for use will it be possible to get rid of the problem and, with it, these futile, sticking-plaster, attempts at solutions.

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#### **FREDERICK ENGELS ON HISTORICAL MATERIALISM**

*The materialist conception of history has a lot of dangerous friends nowadays, who use it as an excuse for not studying history. Just as Marx, commenting on the French 'Marxists' of the late 'seventies used to say: "All I know is I am not a Marxist".*

*There has also been a discussion ... about the distribution of products in future society, whether this will take place according to the amount of work done or otherwise. The question has been approached very 'materialistically' in opposition to certain idealistic phraseology about justice. But strangely enough it has not struck anyone that, after all, the method of distribution essentially depends on how much there is to distribute, and that this must surely change with the progress of production and social organisation, and that therefore the method of distribution will also change. But everyone who took part in the discussion described 'socialist society' not as something continuously changing and advancing but as something stable and fixed once and for all, which must, therefore, also have a method of distribution fixed once and for all. All one can reasonably do, however, is: 1. to try and discover the method of distribution to be used at the beginning, and 2. to try and find the general tendency of the further development. But about this I do not find a single word in the whole debate.*

*In general, the word 'materialist' serves many ... writers ... as a mere phrase with which anything and everything is labelled without further study, that is, they stick on this label and then consider the question disposed of. But our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the Hegelian manner. All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be examined in detail before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-law, aesthetic, philosophic, religious etc., views corresponding to them. Up to now very little has been done in this respect because only a few people have got down to it seriously. We need a great deal of help in this field, for it is immensely big, and anyone who will work seriously can achieve much and distinguish himself ...*

Letter to Conrad Schmidt in Berlin: London, August 5 1890 taken from  
**Engels: Letters on Historical Materialism 1890-94, Moscow 1980, p79**

## IRAQ - BOMBING FOR PEACE?!

*"Millions more will be killed. Millions more will starve. Millions more will be violated. They must have justice."* Robin Cook, New Labour's Foreign Secretary, wrote this, arguing for an international court to deal with "genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes" (**The Observer**, 14 June 1998). This was the voice of a government which claimed its foreign policy had "*an ethical dimension*".

Only six months later Cook and his colleagues were enthusiastically supporting Clinton's attack on Iraq - three or four nights of missiles and bombs, squeezed in between Clinton's trip to Israel and the start of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, a time when such attacks might be 'objectionable' or 'offensive'.

Cynically, it was not purely coincidental that this happened just when Congress was to debate perjury charges against Clinton and whether he should face impeachment proceedings in the Senate. Clinton has used wars in faraway places previously as a sure way of hijacking the headlines. When in a corner, this is his usual ploy. Earlier, there was the bombing of a Sudanese factory, allegedly a terrorist facility but actually a pharmaceutical plant, producing half Sudan's output of an anti-malaria drug essential for saving thousands of lives in a country where malaria is endemic.

That attack was timed to coincide with the debate on Starr's report to Congress, citing evidence of Clinton's perjury and obstruction of justice. Unscrupulously, Clinton has clung to power by attacking and demonizing some relatively weak state - Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq - as a supposed threat to "*peace and stability*".

For years Noam Chomsky has opposed American foreign policy as 'state terrorism'. Clinton's declaration on Iraq - that US forces would "*attack without warning*" - is a classic case. To attack without warning is what every terrorist organisation does: attacks without warning, usually against civilians, are typical

of terrorism. In fact the dictionary defines a terrorist as "one who favours or uses terror-inspiring methods of governing or of coercing government or community" (Oxford English Dictionary). That is a good description of Batman and Robin's 'ethical' policy on Iraq.

### Ends and Means

The specious argument that 'the end justifies the means' used to be used by the Communist Party, defending Stalin's dictatorship. Now we have Blair's Jesuitical justification for the blitz on Baghdad.

*Those who abuse force to wage war must be confronted by those who are willing to use force to maintain peace (20 December 1998).*

This argument is bogus. The effect of attacking any state is to lead it to reinforce its defences. To create peace by waging war is impossible.

One aim of the attack was said to be to destroy Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" so as to ensure "peace and stability in the region" (Blair, 20 December 1998). Yet the best outcome capitalism can ever offer is merely a state of armed truce, followed - sooner or later - by renewed preparations for war. As we argued, nearly 60 years ago:

*Another war would be followed by new treaties forced on the vanquished by the victors, and by preparation for further wars, new dictatorships and terrorism*  
**(SPGB Statement 24 September 1939)**

Another of Blair's arguments is that Saddam is an "evil dictator". But in the real world, there are many dictators: which of them is not evil? Perhaps Blair has a list of decent, ethical dictators? Moreover, the aims of this attack did not include the overthrow of Saddam's regime. As Blair said, the aim was to put Saddam back "*in his cage*". So Saddam would remain in power, his tyranny intact.

Curiously, the Blair government, like Clinton's, is quite happy to do business with many dictatorships and states with a rotten record on human rights - Indonesia, Nigeria, China - to name but a few. Also, one should not forget that Saddam's 'civil' regime was backed by Britain and America during the lengthy bloodbath of the Iran-Iraq war, when British and American firms supplied Saddam with most of his weaponry, with the approval of their governments.

A third justification offered was Saddam's record of using chemical and biological weapons against civilians, plus the belief that he has a nuclear weapons programme. But the British record is not one of unsullied innocence.

*It is known that in 1919, Churchill, then Secretary for War and Colonial Secretary, encouraged the use by the RAF of mustard gas bombs in Iraq, as an alternative to deploying the army against the Kurds.*

(**The Guardian**, 2 November 1998)

Later, in 1944, Churchill was equally ruthless in urging the forces to prepare to use poison gas against German cities.

*It is absurd to consider morality on this topic when everybody used it (poison gas) in the last war without a word of complaint from the moralists or the Church .... I quite agree that it may be several weeks or even months before I shall ask you to drench Germany with poison gas, and if we do it, let us do it 100 per cent.*

(Letters to General Ismay, July 1944, quoted in **The Guardian**, 2 November 1998)

The British and American governments cannot claim that their hands are clean where chemical, biological or nuclear weapons are concerned, or that they would never use these against civilians. In the 1920's Britain dropped mustard gas on Iraqi villages, and later the USA used napalm and Agent Orange in Vietnam.

*The USA remains the only state to have dropped nuclear bombs on cities. Only eight years ago, in the Gulf War, American use of depleted uranium for casing artillery shells has since been linked to the Gulf War Syndrome causing disease and cancers among their and other forces. This was probably the cause of the increase in cancers in Iraq*

*(Channel 4, 11 November 1998)*

Another question of double standards: Blair, echoing Clinton and Albright, argued that Iraq had not complied with the UN Inspections. This non-compliance, said Madeleine Albright, was a flouting of "*the rule of law and the will of the world*" (16 December 1998). But how many UN resolutions has Israel flouted? Israel, a nuclear power, frequently attacks civilians in Lebanon. As for the "*will of the world*", this is simply another way of saying the will of the US government and the interests of the American capitalists in controlling the oil resources of the region.

Lacking support from other countries (the so-called 'international community'), with confusion about the supposed aims of the attack; with criticism from, usually supportive, Establishment voices, eg Simon Jenkins and General Sir Michael Rose (Times, 18 December 1998) and even diplomats, Sir Tim Garden and Sir John Weston (BBC-News 24, 20 December 1998); with a procedural dodge to avoid any vote being recorded in the Commons; plus protests and polls showing the public were not wholly in support; altogether it seems that Clinton and Blair's arguments failed to win support.

#### **Enforcing the 'new world order'**

In our recent pamphlet, **War and Capitalism**, we emphasized the difference here is between what politicians and media hacks tell us a war is about, and what it really is about. In this case, the arguments put forward to justify the attack on Iraq were even more unconvincing than usual.

Probably, then, there were other unstated reasons. Cynically, one notes the

timing convenient for Clinton and inconvenient for his Republican opponents.

Likewise, we note that, in the Gulf War, America's so-called 'smart' missiles missed half their targets. Expensive. Perhaps the military wanted to test the improved accuracy of their latest electronics and laser guidance systems? Certainly, they carefully recorded the percentages of hits, near-hits and misses.

A third possible reason for this attack on a relatively weak country, suffering from "*the screw of sanctions on poor, starving, sick people*" (Edward Said, **The Observer**, 20 December 1998), could have been as a demonstration of power, showing that the USA is now the global policeman and that US policy will now be enforced globally as "*the will of the world*", in Albright's phrase.

This reminds one, sickeningly, of Orwell's prediction, 50 years ago:

*"If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face - for ever".*  
(Nineteen Eighty Four)

He feared only the spread of totalitarian states, like Stalinist Russia. The threat is equally from the so-called 'free world'.

Either way, whether with dictatorship or democracy, this seems to be the only sort of future capitalism offers, with periodic pauses for an uneasy armed truce as the weapons designers prepare for future conflicts. We urge all workers to recognise that this system is unsafe and works against our interests.

*Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.*

President Eisenhower, a former General, made this indictment of the system in a 1953 speech. Only Socialism gives a chance of stopping this Orwellian nightmare from continuing for generations to come, as Saddam's and Clinton's successors use ever nastier and more accurate weapons, with or without warning.

There is a possible alternative: Socialism. To achieve it requires the working class to wake up, to stop sleepwalking into yet more nightmares of terror, to oppose capitalism and end it through conscious political action. Do we really want another century of war and destruction?

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